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E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PREL, OVIP, CO, NU, ES
SUBJECT: CODEL ALEXANDER MEETING WITH PRESIDENT BETANCUR

1. SECRET - ENTIRE TEXT.

2. SUMMARY: ON AUGUST 17 REPRESENTATIVES WILLIAM ALEXANDER AND MICKEY LELAND DISCUSSED WITH PRESIDENT BETANCUR, RECENT DEVELOPMENTS IN THE NICARAGUAN ELECTORAL PROCESS, INCLUDING THE POSSIBILITY OF "RE-OPENING" THE ELECTIONS, THE PARTICIPATION OF ARTURO CRUZ AND THE INFLUENCE OF FIDEL CASTRO ON THE SANDINISTA JUNTA. REP. ALEXANDER STATED THAT A MAJOR IMPEDIMENT, THE PROPOSED DIALOGUE BETWEEN THE JUNTA AND SOMOCISTAS AMONG THE OPPOSITION, HAD BEEN OVERCOME. PRESIDENT BETANCUR SPOKE OF HIS RECENT CONVERSATIONS WITH SANDINISTA JUNTA MEMBER SERGIO RAMIREZ IN QUITO, RELATING THE NICARAGUAN'S POINT OF VIEW ABOUT EVENTS. BETANCUR ALSO NOTED THAT THE CONTADORA GROUP WAS SETTING ITS SIGHTS ON EL SALVADOR NOW THAT NAPOLEON DUARTE SEEMS MORE SECURE IN HIS POSITION AS HEAD OF STATE. END SUMMARY.

3. PRESIDENT BETANCUR TOLD REPRESENTATIVES WILLIAM ALEXANDER AND MICKEY LELAND DURING THE COURSE OF THEIR MEETING AT THE NARINO PALACE AUGUST 17 THAT IN RECENT CONVERSATIONS HE HAD ATTEMPTED TO IMPRESS UPON FSLN JUNTA MEMBER SERGIO RAMIREZ THE IMPORTANCE OF A FREE, OPEN AND DEMOCRATIC ELECTORAL PROCESS IN NICARAGUA. BETANCUR SAID HE TOLD RAMIREZ THAT TO HAVE AN ELECTION WITHOUT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE CATHOLIC CHURCH, WITHOUT A FREE PRESS AND WITHOUT GOOD RELATIONS WITH THE BUSINESS COMMUNITY WAS AKIN TO SINGING IN THE SHOWER SINCE NO ONE WOULD HEAR THE SONG BECAUSE OF THE NOISE OF THE WATER. BETANCUR SAID HE HAD STRESSED THAT THE PARTICIPATION OF ARTURO CRUZ IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS IS ESSENTIAL FOR THE NICARAGUAN ELECTIONS TO BE CREDIBLE TO THE WORLD.

4. REPRESENTATIVE ALEXANDER TOLD BETANCUR THAT CRUZ,

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A PERSONAL FRIEND, HAD BEEN CONCERNED ABOUT THE CONDITIONS FOR PARTICIPATION IN THE ELECTORAL PROCESS.

BETANCUR REPLIED THAT RAMIREZ CONSIDERED NINE OF THE TEN POINTS RAISED BY CRUZ REASONABLE. HOWEVER, THE TENTH POINT, WHICH CALLED FOR THE JUNTA TO ENGAGE IN DIALOGUE WITH ALL OPPOSITION GROUPS INCLUDING THE SOMOCISTAS, WAS OUT OF THE QUESTION. BETANCUR SAID CRUZ KNEW THAT HE IS OF VALUE TO THE ELECTIONS AND HAD TAKEN A HARD LINE TO EXACT CONDITIONS THAT THE SANDINISTA JUNTA WAS NOT PREPARED TO GIVE.

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5. BETANCUR ASKED ALEXANDER IF HE COULD DO SOMETHING TO REDUCE CRUZ' INTRANSIGENCE. ACCORDING TO BETANCUR, RAMIREZ SAID THAT SOME PROGRESS IS BEING MADE IN THE IMPROVEMENT OF RELATIONS WITH THE BUSINESS SECTOR. A POSSIBILITY OF REOPENING THE ELECTORAL PROCESS EXISTS, BETANCUR SAID, AND HE HOPED THAT CRUZ HAS SECOND THOUGHTS ABOUT PARTICIPATING. BETANCUR ADDED THAT CRUZ SHOULD NOT STICK TO HIS HARD LINE ABOUT DIALOGUE WITH THE OPPOSITION, THOUGH HE SHOULD CONTINUE TO PUSH FOR PRESS FREEDOM AND BETTER CHURCH/STATE RELATIONS.

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REP. ALEXANDER INFORMED BETANCUR THAT THE QUESTION OF DIALOGUE WITH THE "SOMOCISTAS" WAS NO LONGER AN OBSTACLE SINCE FDN CHIEF ALDOLFO CALERO HAD STATED PUBLICLY THAT THE OPPOSITION FORCES WOULD NO LONGER INSIST ON THAT PARTICULAR REQUISITE. REP. ALEXANDER TOLD BETANCUR THAT CALERO'S REMARKS WERE REPORTED IN THE NEW YORK TIMES. HE ADDED THAT CRUZ WOULD BE RETURNING TO MANAGUA SOON. BETANCUR REPLIED THAT HE WOULD INFORM RAMIREZ OF THIS DEVELOPMENT RIGHT AWAY.

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6. BETANCUR ALSO ADDRESSED THE NEGATIVE IMAGE THAT THE SANDINISTA EXPULSION OF TEN PRIESTS HAD GENERATED AROUND THE WORLD. HE SAID THAT HE PERCEIVED THE EXPULSION AS AN ACT OF AGGRESSION AGAINST ALL CHURCHES AND RELIGIONS. WHILE IN QUITO FOR THE INAUGURATION OF PRESIDENT LEON FEBRES CORDERO, THE COLOMBIAN PRESIDENT TALKED TO VENEZUELAN PRESIDENT JAIME LUSINCHI ABOUT THE POSSIBILITY OF APPROACHING RAMIREZ ON THIS SUBJECT. THE IDEA WAS TO GET NICARAGUA TO ALLOW THESE TEN FOREIGN PRIESTS TO BE REPLACED BY OTHERS, THEREBY FOCUSING ON THE SPECIFIC ACTIVITIES OF THE

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PRIESTS AND NOT THE CHURCH AS AN INSTITUTION. RAMIREZ HAD AGREED TO STUDY THE MATTER, ACCORDING TO BETANCUR. BETANCUR SAID HE HAD ALSO CONTACTED THE POPE TO SEE IF THIS PROPOSAL WAS ACCEPTABLE TO THE CHURCH. BETANCUR ADDED THAT HE WAS SEEKING CONTACTS THROUGH THE LATIN AMERICAN BISHOP'S CONFERENCE (CELAM) IN BOGOTA AS WELL TO HELP IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN THE SANDINISTA JUNTA AND THE CHURCH.

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7. BETANCUR SAID THAT THE ROLE OF OBSERVERS IN THE NICARAGUAN ELECTION WAS DISCUSSED AMONG REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CONTADORA GROUP WHILE IN QUITO. BETANCUR SAID THAT IT WAS EMPHASIZED THAT OBSERVERS SHOULD FOCUS ON THE ELECTORAL PROCESS, I.E., VOTER REGISTRATION AND CAMPAIGNS.

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HE NOTED THAT HAVING OBSERVERS PRESENT ONLY DURING THE ACTUAL ELECTIONS WOULD CONSTITUTE A DE FACTO SEAL OF APPROVAL, NO MATTER WHAT THEIR OUTCOME.

8. REP. ALEXANDER BROUGHT UP FIDEL CASTRO'S ROLE IN THE CENTRAL AMERICA PEACE PROCESS, HAVING SPOKEN WITH THE CUBAN LEADER AT LENGTH JUST PRIOR TO COMING TO COLOMBIA. REP. ALEXANDER SAID THAT HE HAD ATTEMPTED TO "ENCOURAGE DANIEL ORTEGA TO ACHIEVE CREDIBLE ELECTIONS." REP. ALEXANDER ASKED BETANCUR IF CASTRO COULD BE ENCOURAGED PRIVATELY TO TAKE A HAND IN THE MATTER SINCE CASTRO HAD SHIED AWAY FROM THE SUGGESTION AT REP. ALEXANDER'S RECENT MEETING WITH CASTRO. BETANCUR OBSERVED THAT CASTRO LIKES TO PLAY BOTH SIDES OF THE ISSUE OF FREE ELECTIONS IN NICARAGUA SO THAT IF THEY GO WELL, HE COULD TAKE CREDIT; AND IF THEY GO POORLY, HE WOULD HAVE HAD NOTHING TO DO WITH THEM. REP. ALEXANDER ALSO NOTED THAT IF CASTRO COULD BE ENCOURAGED TO TALK TO ORTEGA IT WOULD BE AN OPPORTUNITY FOR THE SANDINISTAS TO ACHIEVE CREDIBILITY FOR THEMSELVES AND FOR SOCIALISM AS WELL AS AN OPPORTUNITY TO IMPROVE RELATIONS BETWEEN NICARAGUA AND THE U.S.

9. IN TERMS OF BILATERAL U.S.-NICARAGUAN RELATIONS, BETANCUR SAID THAT THE SANDINISTAS ARE WARY OF U.S. INTENTIONS. HE SAID THAT THE MANZANILLO TALKS BETWEEN AMBASSADOR SHLAUDEMAN AND VICE FOREIGN MINISTER TINOCO ARE BEING THOUGHT OF BY THE SANDINISTAS AS A U.S. CAMPAIGN TACTIC PRIOR TO THE U.S. ELECTIONS. BETANCUR DISCOUNTED THIS CRITICISM, NOTING THAT THE SANDINISTAS ARE CALLING THE KETTLE BLACK, SINCE THEY TOO ARE IN AN ELECTORAL PROCESS AT THIS TIME AND ARE PLAYING A SIMILAR POLITICAL GAME.

10. BETANCUR MADE A FINAL POINT IN RELATION TO PEACE IN CENTRAL AMERICA. HE NOTED THAT SALVADORAN PRESIDENT NAPOLION DUARTE FEELS MORE SECURE AT THIS TIME AND THAT THE DIALOGUE, BETWEEN THE GUERRILLAS AND THE PEACE COMMISSION, WHICH HAD BEEN DELAYED BY THE ELECTIONS IN EL SALVADOR, CAN BE RESUMED. BETANCUR SAID HE HOPES TO BRING THE CHURCH INTO THE DIALOGUE TO SERVE AS A CONDUIT FOR IDEAS AND PROPOSALS. HE ADDED THAT THE CONTADORA GROUP HAD AGREED TO SEND LETTERS TO THE FOREIGN MINISTRIES OF CENTRAL AMERICA TO RENEW THE DIALOGUE.

11. REP. ALEXANDER AND LELAND PARTED MOST CORDIALLY FROM BETANCUR, THE LATTER URGING THEM TO KEEP IN TOUCH AND RETURN SOON TO COLOMBIA, THE FORMER OFFERING TO SHOW PRESIDENT BETANCUR ABOUT WASHINGTON WHEN HE VISITS THE U.S. REP. LELAND WARMLY CONGRATULATED PRESIDENT BETANCUR FOR HIS WORK IN THE CONTADORA PEACE PROCESS. TAMBS

END OF MESSAGE

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